

**MIDDLE AMERICA INFORMATION BUREAU**

**Conducted By United Fruit Company**

**9 ROCKEFELLER PLAZA**

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**MIDDLE AMERICA AND US**

The world is getting smaller. Far places are becoming near places. By modern airplane no habitable area in the world is more than about 70 flight hours from any other habitable place.

As far places become nearer, near places just naturally rub elbows and amalgamate. This fact which is no longer avoidable adds a new pertinence to the word "interdependence". It makes this particular word basic to our world of today and tomorrow.

"Interdependence" applies to nations the same as to people. All of the nations of this Western Hemisphere are now close neighbors and all are, or we hope will shortly be, friendly neighbors. Certainly all are interdependent. Our nearest Latin American neighbors, and our most closely interdependent ones, happen to be the ten sovereign republics of Middle America; the Republic of Mexico, the six independent nations of Central America -- which are Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica and Panama; and the Caribbean island republics of Cuba, Haiti and the Dominican Republic. As a recent "New York Sun" editorial points out, "Middle America" is a good designation for these nearest American neighbors.

These ten nations are our southern thresholds which join the United States with the vast and challenging frontiers of South America. When one knows Middle America, inevitably one has learned a great deal about South America.

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Also one has learned his front door landmarks, which is always a rather good idea. If one likes to play with maps, one can enclose the United States within a circle, making the center of that circle Kansas City or another central point, and one sees that the same circle that encompasses Maine and California also takes in most of Middle America -- which is closer to the center of the United States than is Maine to California.

Again looking at a map you notice that seven of the ten countries of Middle America are actually part of our continent, and that in terms of travel routes all are strategic control boards for North America and for the entire Hemisphere. Looking still more closely at a map one notices that Mexico, the richly resourceful second power of North America, is about one-fourth as big in area as all the United States; that Guatemala has about the area of New York State; that Honduras is about the area of Pennsylvania; El Salvador is twice the size of Vermont; Nicaragua of Michigan; Costa Rica is roughly the size of West Virginia; Panama of Indiana; Cuba of Louisiana; the Dominican Republic is somewhat smaller than West Virginia; while Haiti, smaller in area than Maryland, is the smallest American republic and (with about 3,000,000 people) the most densely populated independent nation in the whole world.

A bit more looking will show that the total area of all Middle America is nearly one-third that of the United States; that its total population is above 37 million; and that these nearest American neighbors are 37 million of our best customers. Even before Pearl Harbor about 82 percent of all exports from all countries of Middle America came to the United States. Now that the ten Middle

American nations are our comrades and allies in war, the percentages of their United States trade to their total trade are practically 100; which means that commercial interdependence between the United States and Middle America is approximately the same as interdependence between Iowa and Indiana, or any other individual states of these United States.

These are war times. All of Middle America -- ten of our twelve allies in this Hemisphere -- are in the war on our side. One of these allies, Costa Rica, was actually the first American republic to declare war on the Axis. Costa Rica is probably the most complete democracy in the world today. But it is a fighting democracy and when the Costa Rican Government, on that fateful December Sunday in 1941, heard of Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor, it didn't wait for the United States to declare war. Costa Rica declared war against the Axis before we did. Within two days five other Middle American republics had followed suit. Within a few months all the rest had.

This, too, bears directly on our interdependence with Middle America. When the Japanese seized the Pacific tropics they promptly looted the great reservoir of established tropical crops. Before Pearl Harbor we had been importing about 94 percent of all our needed tropical products -- rubber, quinine, essential oils, palm type oils, tannins, etc. -- from the Far East and only about 6 percent from all the American Tropics; that is, we imported the great bulk of our tropical crops which our country needs and cannot grow within domestic boundaries -- not from our near neighbors to the south but from such comparatively remote corners of creation as Malaya, the

Netherlands Indies, Ceylon and other points which Japan has either seized or gravely threatened.

Since December, 1941 we have lost most of our Far East sources of essential tropical crops, and we have begun to look on the almost unbelievably productive lands of Middle America not only as close neighbors but as near-at-hand sources of valuable and indispensable goods.

1. From Middle America comes practically all of our supply of bananas, a staple, popular and highly nutritious fruit which feeds hungry people well; which (if given shipping space) can flow to our markets at the rate of a million or more tons a year, and greatly relieve our scarcity of farm labor and of essential foods. (Middle America has plenty of farm labor and some of it ranks with the best findable anywhere in the world).

2. Sugar, the first essential food to be rationed in the United States, is another great export of Middle America. The Island of Cuba alone now supplies more than half the sugar we eat. Though Cuba is no bigger than the state of Louisiana, Cuba has grown more sugar in one year than the whole United States consumes, and Cuba could probably grow and export enough sugar for all major nations -- as much as 10 million tons per year.

3. Coffee, which was our second rationed commodity, grows in all Middle American countries, and second to Brazil Middle America has the world's largest export reservoir of coffee -- about 4.5 million bags per year -- 132 pounds to the bag. Also Middle American coffees include most of the fine mild "flavor" grades

consumed in the United States.

4. The countries of Middle America supply a third or more of our chocolate and cocoa -- harvests of a silver-dappled tropical orchard tree which is native to the American tropics.

5. From its jungles, its dry plateaus and its rich cultivated fields Middle America is supplying us important amounts of natural rubber; guayule of bush rubber from the high dry plateaus of Mexico; cryptostegia or vine rubber from Mexico, Haiti and the Dominican Republic; and more important Hevea, or tree rubber, which planted in many parts of the tropical world has supplied more than nine-tenths of all rubber used by mankind.

The Hevea tree is native to the Amazon Basin of South America. But recent U.S. Department of Agriculture surveys show that the tree can be grown effectively in all countries of Middle America -- with the possible exception of Cuba. Within Middle America our Department of Agriculture now has five Hevea nurseries and experiment stations. In east Costa Rica the Goodyear Rubber Plantations Company is successfully planting and harvesting Hevea. Goodyear also has an excellent Hevea nursery near Gatun, Panama. The United Fruit Company is actually planting Hevea nurseries and orchards in Panama, Costa Rica, Honduras, and Guatemala; also in Colombia, South America. In Haiti the Shada Company is planting 125,000 acres to rubber-bearing crops, Hevea included. Six years are required to bring the Hevea tree to successful bearing. Regardless of this Middle America is proving its place as a great rubber reservoir of tomorrow. By scientific analysis Middle America has some of the world's richest soils; and its great crops grow -- not just during the summer, but

every day of the whole year.

6. By urgent necessity and demand Middle America is replacing the Far East tropics as reservoir of tropical fibers, which war effort and our staple industries require by the millions of pounds. One of these great fiber crops is abaca or Manila hemp, which is required for making heavy resilient salt-resisting rope of the type demanded by our fighting Navy and our gallant Merchant Marine.

Until Japan's loot of the Far East, most of our Manila hemp came from the Philippines and the Netherlands Indies. When those great territories fell, our Middle American neighbors began planting abaca -- a tropical banana-like plant whose stem contains the strong, resilient fibers. At Almirante, Panama, the United Fruit Company had already established a 2,100-acre abaca plantation. After Pearl Harbor that was the Hemisphere's only dependable supply of abaca planting stock.

Early in 1942 the United Fruit Company sold this seed plantation to the U.S. Government. On contract with the Defense Supplies Corporation, the United Fruit Company has already planted about 20,000 acres of abaca in select locales of Panama, Costa Rica, Honduras and Guatemala, and is now at work planting a second 20,000 acres. Citizen farmers of Costa Rica and other Middle American countries are also planting the crop. Since abaca reaches harvest age in 18 to 20 months, our fighting Navy is already getting Manila hemp from Middle America and will shortly be getting a great deal more.

Besides abaca, Mexico and El Salvador now produce most of our supply of henequen, a hard fiber which makes bindertwine and

other wrapping cords. Honduras and Costa Rica are beginning to produce Roselle, another tropical fiber plant, widely used for making cordage and bagging.

7. Middle America also produces quinine, the greatest of therapeutics and man's best proved defense against malaria -- not to mention baldness. Quinine is made from the bark of the cinchona (sin-kona) tree and before Pearl Harbor the Dutch Island of Java grew and processed most of the world's quinine. But in Guatemala, as early as 1872, enterprising farmers had begun planting cinchona trees. Therefore, Guatemala now has at least 1,600,000 mature quinine trees, and Guatemala is going in for the scientific horticulture of cinchona.

Costa Rica has recently supplied our Government with 10,000 acres of land suited to cinchona trees. Our Government plans to plant the trees and after 25 years to return the plantings to Costa Rica.

8. Middle America is an active or potential larder for many other tropical crops urgently and permanently needed by the United States. These include the standard tropical spices, such as black pepper, white pepper (harvested from the same vine), pimentos, common peppers, all-spice, nutmeg, cloves, gingers, vanilla and others. They also include rotenone plants (whose roots produce the unusually valuable insecticide which destroys insects and fungi without making fruits or green vegetables injurious to man). We need millions of pounds of rotenone for our victory gardens. Also doctors prescribe rotenone for treating skin diseases. Our fighting forces use it for protection against lice. Veterinarians use it to protect

valuable livestock from parasites.

Middle America has great stores of native coconut and other palm oils, critically needed in peace or war for staple industrial uses; for washing hair, making fine soaps and cosmetics, for copper and steel plating and many other uses. Middle America can grow, and to some extent is already growing, tung oil used in quick-drying paints and varnishes; castor oil for special lubricants, machine tools, aviation maintenance and you know what else; also the essential oils which are distilled from certain tropical grasses. The latter include citronella, lemon grass oil, and vetiver, which are used variously in the manufacture of menthols, insect sprays, perfumes, toilet soaps and other staples.

Middle America grows many valuable drug plants such as ipecac and senna (formerly imported from India and Africa) and that ultra-light fiber called kapok or tree cotton which is harvested from the native Cerba trees and used for life preservers and to stuff our new pillows, cushions and our daughters' or grand-daughters' new dolls.

The forests of Middle America hold some of the world's most valuable woods -- the mahogany from which we make furniture and more recently the hulls of our Navy's fleet, fast subchasers; balsa, an extremely light wood which is essential for making gliders, life rafts and certain airplane parts; also lignum vitae, a water-resistant hard wood used in ship machinery and other assemblies; and dyewoods, which still have a great deal to do with coloring our suits which do not fade before the bare skin commences to show through. In various parts of Middle America our Department of Agriculture, the



United Fruit Company and other great pioneers are also planting teak-wood (one of the most valuable ship timbers and formerly imported from war-blocked Ceylon and Siam); cork, which is tropical or subtropical oak trees; also various tropical cedars and East Indian rosewood for fine furnitures and carving materials.

The foundation resources of Middle America are agricultural. That is why I have given this much time to talking about Middle American crops. Actually I have mentioned only about one-tenth of the known and useful crops of Middle America. From time to time we are certain to be hearing of other Middle American crops which are destined to become important to our homes, shops, offices or factories.

Nobody can know Middle America well enough without knowing something about its truly impressive mineral resources. Almost unquestionably Mexico is the world's richest reservoir of strategic and industrial metals and minerals. Mexico is a metallurgist's paradise. Its "big six" metal exports are silver, gold, zinc, lead, copper and petroleum. Twenty-five metric tons of refined bar gold; 2500 metric tons of refined bar silver; 155,000 metric tons respectively of lead and zinc concentrates; 48,000 tons of bar copper, 45 to 50 million barrels of petroleum -- those are typical yearly figures in Mexican mineral wealth.

Mexico has many strategic metals -- tin, graphite, arsenium, cadmium, selenium, molybdenum, tungsten, and manganese -- all metallic minerals which are helping make our war materials tougher,

harder and more powerful.

Minerals are the better half of Mexico's exports; and an international passport to importance. So are Mexico's industries which now number about 12,000 establishments; 500 electric plants with annual output of more than  $2\frac{1}{2}$  billion kilowatt hours; 30,000 cotton looms; 4,000 miles of railroads; 125 radio broadcasting stations; 3,500 post offices; 9,000 new schools; and many other significant developments in an ever more challenging world.

Guatemala has important resources in mercury, another mineral resource which we urgently and permanently need. Guatemala also supplies most of the chicle which makes our chewing gum. Honduras and El Salvador supply us with important quantities of gold and silver. Honduras and Nicaragua are our principal sources of mahogany. El Salvador supplies balsam, which is important to surgery. Panama supplies us tortoise shell, pearls, coconuts and many other important products.

Besides a great part of our sugar, Cuba is supplying us with important quantities of manganese (for making steel), copper, sponges and cordage. The Dominican Republic supplies us with important quantities of gold and starch. Haiti supplies many products including coffee and goat skins. Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador, Costa Rica and Nicaragua are all important suppliers of coffee.

But trade and friendship with our nearer Latin American neighbors are a two-way traffic. They need our friendship even as we need theirs. And they need our goods, just as we need their

goods. While shipping facilities permitted, the total foreign trade of Middle America was about three-quarters of a billion dollars per year. Given a chance, this total will grow. In the past about three-fourths of all Middle American imports came from the United States. Given a chance, this percentage will also grow.

Eagerly and with every available resource Middle America has bought and is buying our manufactured goods -- cotton and woolen goods, medicine, drugs and other pharmacy products; newsprint and paper goods, machine tools, mining machinery, autos and trucks, tractors and construction machinery, farm machinery, structural iron, cement, gasoline, silk and linen goods, wheat flours, shoes and boots, radios, electrical equipment, Diesel engines, glass and crystalware and scores of other manufactures and merchandise made in the United States. There is no reasonable doubt that our trade with Middle America will remain a two-way traffic.

As never before our ten nearest Latin American neighbors, who are also our allies in a great war to keep the Americas free, are friendly neighbors. It is our job to see that they remain so. For they want to be our friends. They are eminently worthy of our friendship.

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